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SUBJECT: CNDD'S PUBLIC RELATIONS STRATEGY - A LESSON ON
WHAT NOT TO DO

REF: CONAKRY 0145

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY. After receiving an invitation from the CNDD's new public relations firm to come to Conakry for an exclusive interview with CNDD President Moussa Dadis Camara, a Dakar-based member of the Associated Press spent nearly four days waiting for the interview to materialize. It eventually did, but only after she had spent many frustrated hours waiting at the Camp. The interview itself was reportedly disappointing and military officials confiscated a microchip of photographs taken by the journalist's photographer. The CNDD's treatment of the Associated Press representative suggests that the military junta has much to learn about public relations. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) During an off the record background interview with Pol/Econ Chief on March 9, a Dakar-based representative of the Associated Press, Rukmini Callimachi, expressed bemused frustration over her continued lack of access to CNDD President Moussa Dadis Camara. Rukmini had traveled to Conakry at the specific invitation of the President's office, which had recently hired a public relations firm based in New York to improve the military junta's international image (reftel).

HOURS AND HOURS...AND HOURS AND HOURS

¶3. (SBU) Rukmini spent the better part of the weekend at Camp Alpha Yaya waiting for an interview that had not happened by Monday morning. She described how she and her photographer had arrived on Friday evening, but were immediately told by Camp officials that the interview would take place on Saturday instead of that evening as anticipated. After waiting for several hours at Camp Alpha Yaya on Saturday, officials reportedly told her that Dadis was too "tired" and that she should return at noon on Sunday.

¶4. (SBU) Rukmini showed up at the Camp at the appointed time on Sunday -- and then waited more than nine hours before officials announced at 9:30 PM that Dadis was done receiving visitors for the day. "I couldn't take it too personally," she said, "because Vice President Toto Camara and (former Prime Minister) Lansana Kouyate had also been waiting most of the day." She added that "poor Toto looked totally dejected...he was carrying an envelope marked 'confidential - for his Excellence Moussa Dadis Camara, President of the Republic.' I mean, if the Vice President himself could not get in, then it is no surprise that I couldn't."

PLENTY OF TIME FOR OBSERVATION

15. (SBU) Eager to talk about her experience at the camp, Rukmini described the President's quarters as a series of three rooms consisting of the main receiving area and then two separate ante-chambers, which she perceived to be his bedroom and his office. She also noted three life-size portraits of Dadis on the wall. Rukmini said that even though she was told to come at noon, it was clear that Dadis was still sleeping when she arrived. She noted that someone got yelled at after slamming a door, and that others were told that they could not turn up the volume on the television. "Around 5:00, there was all of a sudden a flurry of activity and plates of food were carried into the bedroom...so I assume that is when Dadis actually woke up," Rukmini said.

16. (SBU) Dadis reportedly began receiving visitors at approximately 7:30 PM. After just two hours, someone announced that everyone should come back the next day as Dadis was no longer available. Shortly thereafter, Rukmini described, with a great deal of amusement, how she saw Dadis peeking out into the waiting room from behind a curtain. "He was clearly scoping out the room to see who was there," she said. A few minutes later, Dadis reportedly stormed through the waiting area yelling about economic predation and then publicly berated an unknown government official. "It was all clearly for show...he knew we were there," Rukmini said. She added that her photographer, bored with a weekend of waiting, took a photograph of the display, but was then immediately ordered to destroy it by a military officer.

DISAPPOINTING INTERVIEW

17. (SBU) Although Rukmini did eventually get her interview shortly before departing Conakry, she was not optimistic about how it would go. She said that the CNDD was pressuring her to do a public interview with Dadis over national radio and television, which she was resisting because she would lose any "exclusivity." When Rukmini told the CNDD that they may not want the interview broadcast because she planned to ask sensitive questions, they threatened to bring in someone else to do the interview. She told them that she planned to ask some questions about Claude Pivi, the controversial Minister of Presidential Security. According to Rukmini, the CNDD representative then strongly advised her to refrain from doing so, saying "you can ask whatever you want, but if you ask about Pivi, I guarantee your time in Guinea will be difficult...and I can't guarantee that you will get any of the other interviews we promised."

18. (SBU) Rukmini called PAO after she finally did the interview, reporting that the CNDD had confiscated the memory chip from the photographer's camera. She said that much of the interview was the anticipated blustering, with little substance.

COMMENT

19. (SBU) Dadis' handling of the Associated Press representative seems very much in character, at least in terms of how he has been conducting business in the Camp. However, the fact that the CNDD actually invited select members of the press to Conakry, reportedly as part of a public relations campaign, makes Rukmini's reception somewhat shocking. The Dakar-based representative of the New York Times also flew into town over the weekend, although Embassy has not yet been able to meet with her so it is unclear whether or not she received similar treatment. If her reception was at all akin to Rukmini's, it is unlikely that Dadis and the CNDD will get the positive write-up they were

reportedly looking for. END COMMENT.
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